AI-Native Gen Z: Igniting the Next Wave of Workplace Innovation

Ruth Gilleran, Professor, Babson College

WOBI

Inspiring Ideas

BABSON COLLEGE

Wellesley, MA

1919 Babson Was Founded	**2,800+** Undergraduate Students	**1,100+** Graduate Students
46,000+ Alumni	**90+** Countries Represented	**15+** Executive Education Programs and Certificates

DBA At-a-Glance

- Three-year, blended program
- Three in-person residencies per semester
- 10-20 years of work experience, with 7-10 at the managerial/executive level
- MBA or MS equivalent required
- Terminal degree

#2 College in America

– *The Wall Street Journal*, 2026

#1 for Entrepreneurship

– *U.S. News & World Report*, 29 consecutive times

HOW WE DEFINE ENTREPRENEURSHIP *AS A MINDSET*

An entrepreneurial mindset is about being *opportunity obsessed*, thinking about how processes could be improved or new products or services could be added to the product line. After identifying opportunities, it is about *taking action, learning, refining, and then repeating the process.* An Entrepreneurial mindset applies to a corporate, non-profit, family business, or startup environment.

AI-NATIVE GEN Z: IGNITING THE NEXT WAVE OF WORKPLACE INNOVATION

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1

Understand what Gen Z are being taught and how they are experimenting

2

Appreciate the urgency to integrate Gen Z-led innovations into the organization's strategy

3

Explore how to capture Gen Z experiments and translate them into innovations informed by corporate experience

4

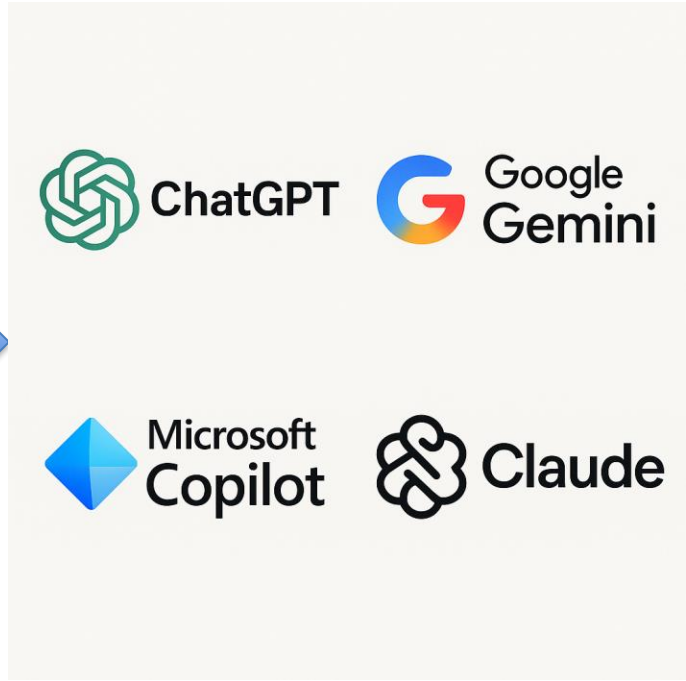
Outline how leaders must change to meet the challenge brought forward by the Gen Z workers and their digital assistants

1

UNDERSTANDING GEN Z EXPERIMENTATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY!

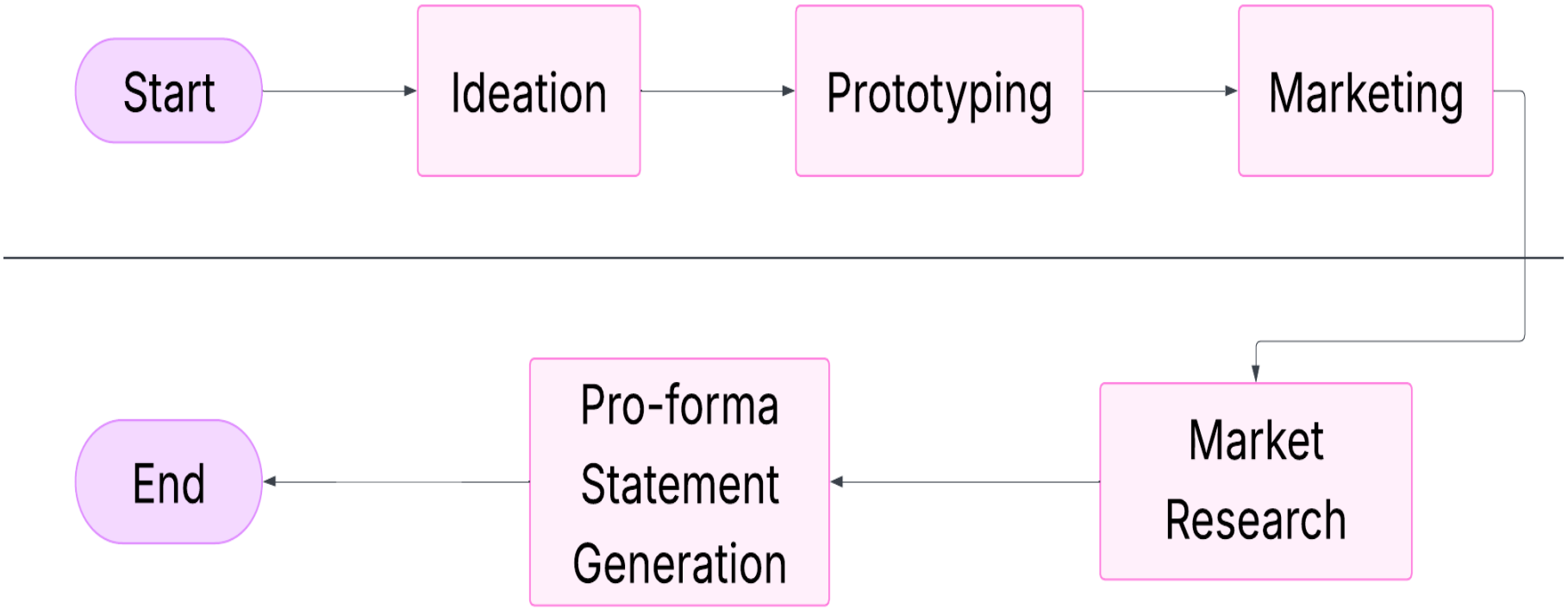
A new generation enters the workforce with their digital co-workers.



At Babson we encourage the virtual workforce!
Meet the first-year students and their digital workers……

Team 1 Team 2 Team 3 Team 4 Team 5 Team 6

HOW ARE THE DIGITAL WORKERS EMPLOYED?



Examples of AI Native Behavior

THE NEED TO BE HUMBLE

“At Google, humility isn’t a soft skill—it’s a strategic advantage.”

Laszlo Bock, former SVP of People Operations, called it *intellectual humility*, the ability to learn because you’re not trapped by your own expertise.

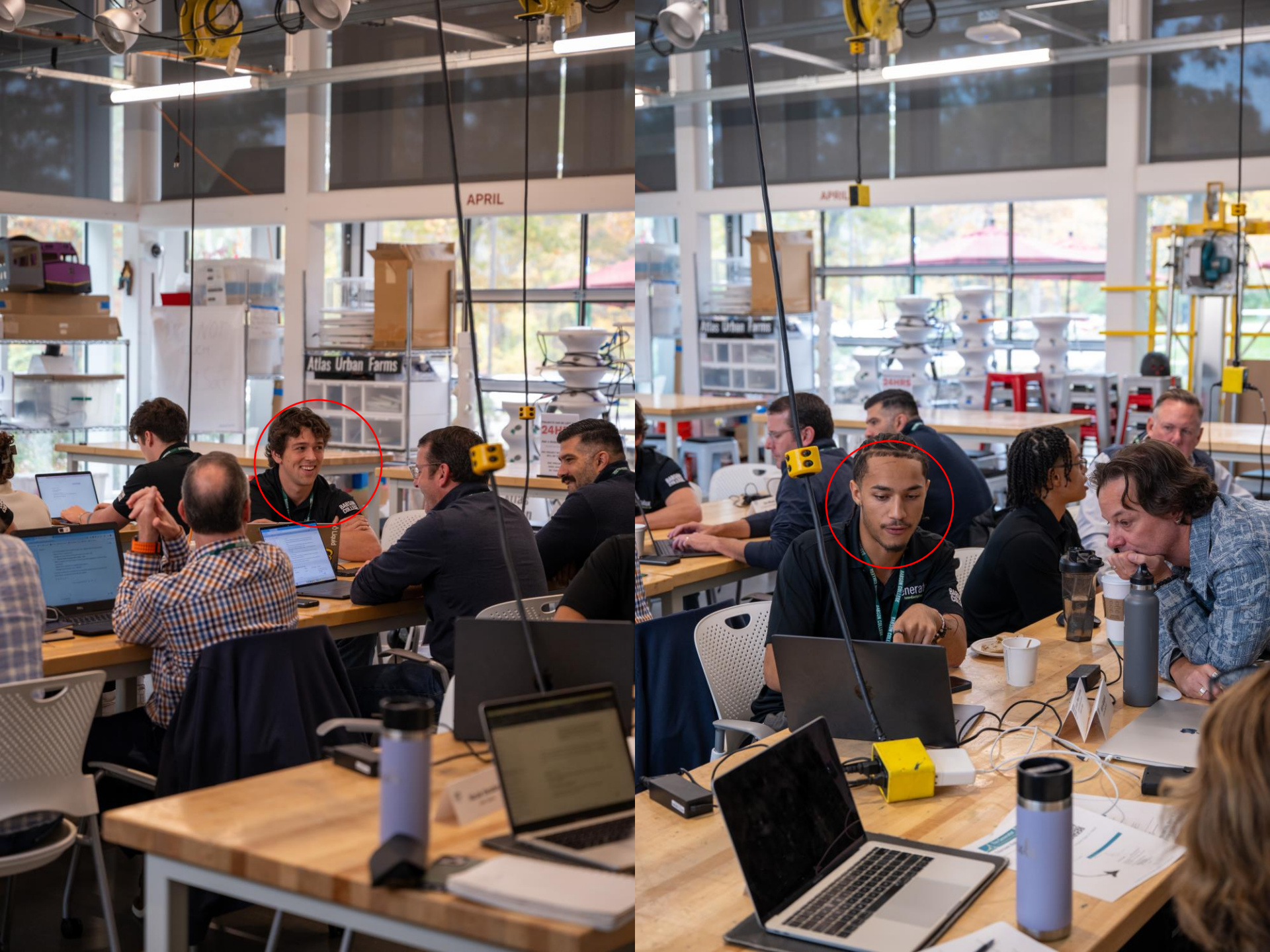
AI INNOVATORS BOOTCAMP
FOR SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS

WELCOME
PROTOTYPING
APRIL
Atlas Urban Farms

Vacuum Former
The Generator

WELCOME
TO THE
PROTOTYPING
CARTS
The Generator

Scholars of Finance
BABSON COLLEGE
BABSON COLLEGE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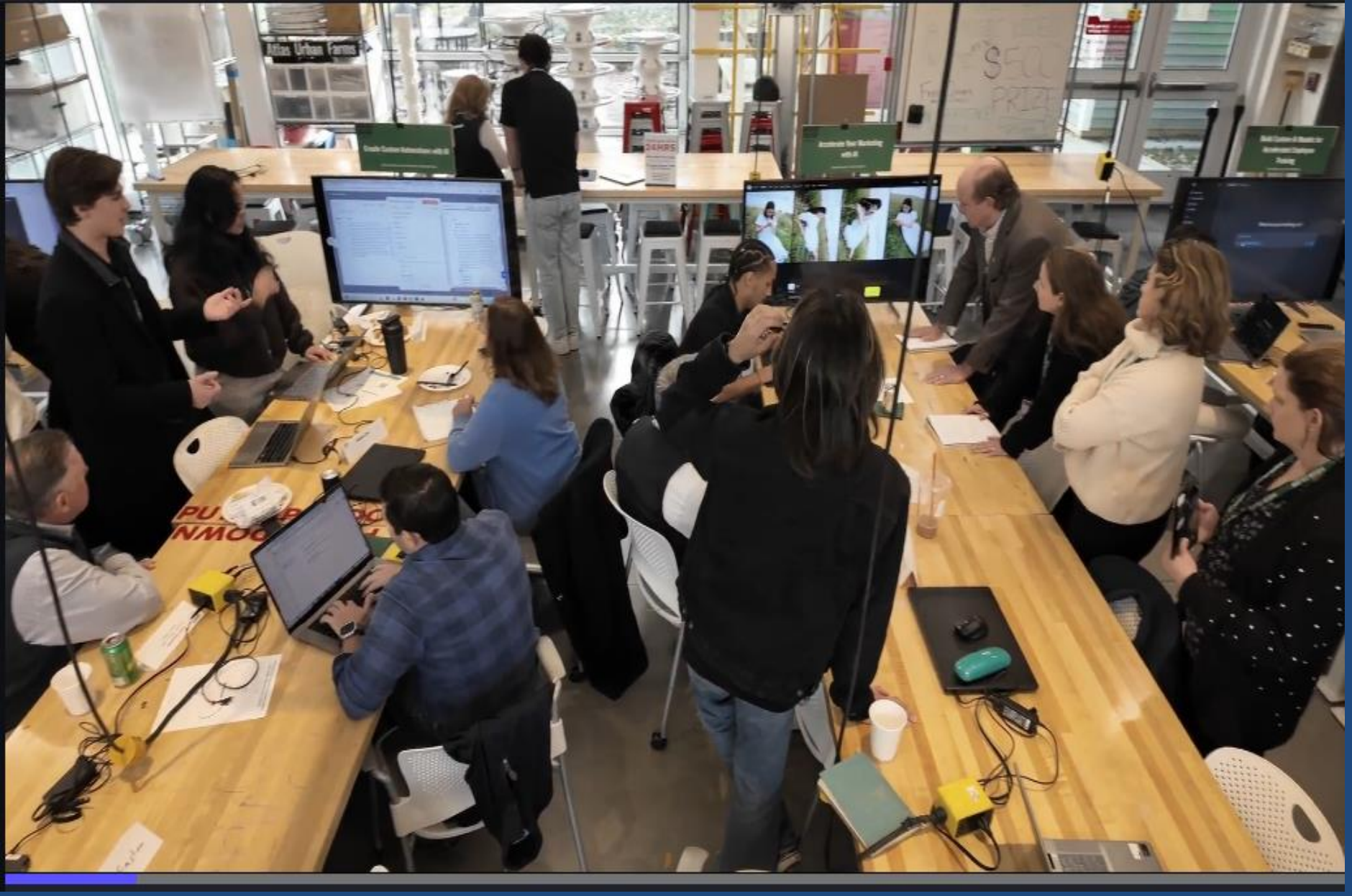


Let’s watch!

https://app.frame.io/reviews/2cfadf62-9571-43b7-9d87-a7b96345a1fe/339a86e4-9f39-4a10-98ac-23ac14f53c07?version=577aacfb-90c8-45a8-a683-577bccf9b854

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

TOOL	DESCRIPTION
N8n	Creates agentic agents that read your calendar, research meeting participants, and send context before meetings
Vapi.ai	Builds conversational voice agents that sound natural, connect to APIs, and integrate with calendars, CRMs, and business workflows
Gemini Video (Google AI Studio)	Records a workflow then creates an accurate standard operating procedure workflow document
ChatGPT + Google Docs	Creates a custom GPT that acts as an on-demand trainer

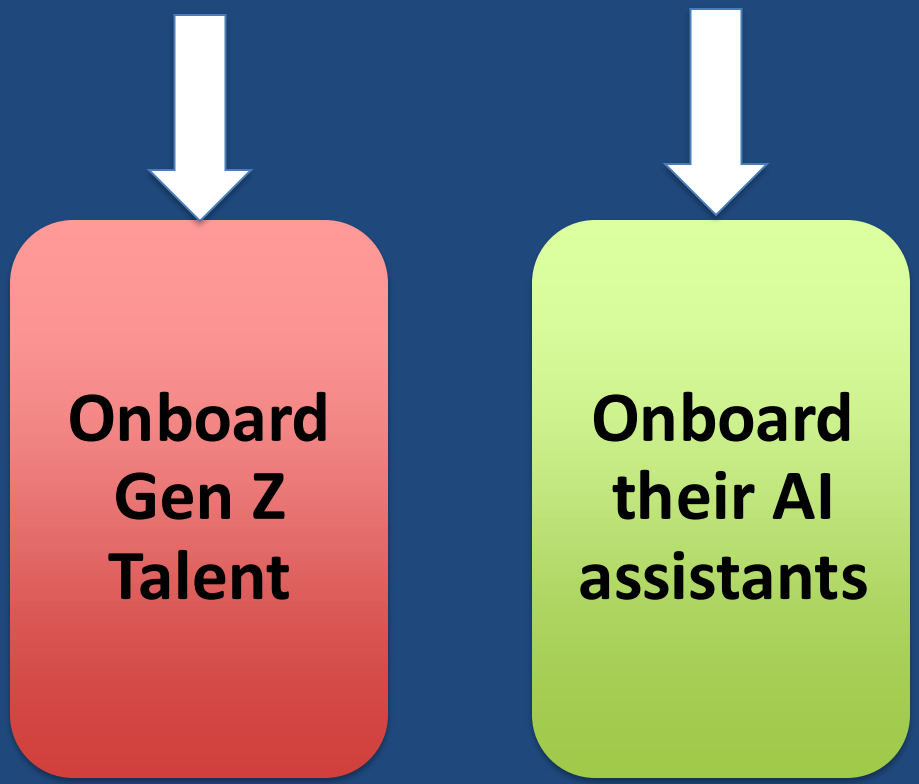
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

TOOL	DESCRIPTION
ChatGPT + Granola AI	Generates awesome meeting notes
Higgsfield.ai	Creates photorealistic advertisements from sketches or text
Loveable	Builds beautiful apps and websites with a prompt
Simpleaudience.io	Identifies 40-60% of anonymous website visitors, then generates prospect lists that feed into your CRM

2 ALIGNING GEN Z-LED INNOVATIONS WITH CORPORATE STRATEGY AND GOVERANCE

BRING YOUR OWN AI (BYOAI)

The DUAL Onboarding Challenge



Opportunity or risk?
*Depends on **leadership readiness**.*

HERE COME THE CITIZEN DEVELOPERS!

DEFINITION: A citizen developer is a non-IT professional who creates applications using low-code or no-code tools. They understand business needs and processes but lack formal programming training.

Benefits:

- Empowers employees to solve problems
- Accelerates application development and delivery
- Reduces professional developers' workloads

Challenges:

- Governance
- Shadow IT
- Security
- Maintenance

THE RISK OF LOW ROI

You want to continue with experimentation but move away from:

only ad-hoc experimentation

structured, enterprise-aligned deployments.

Valentine, M., Politzer, D. J., & Davenport, T. H. (2025, September 18). *How to make enterprise Gen AI work. Harvard Business Review.* https://hbr.org/2025/09/how-to-make-enterprise-gen-ai-work

Johnson&Johnson

Prioritized the following *strategic* enterprise projects:

--Drug development

--HR policy access

--Communicating with physicians

--Identifying supply chain risks

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Prioritized the following *strategic* project:

Using gen AI to customize 10,000 different versions of 20 proprietary marketing assets for the 180 countries and 130 languages in which it does business.

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THE RISK OF SHADOW AI

SET GUARDRAILS & GUIDELINES

Legal

Ethics & Privacy

Acceptable Tools

ChatGPT
Google Gemini
Microsoft Copilot
Claude

Open versus Closed Environment

SHOULD WE BAN BYOAI?

van der Meulen, N., & Wixom, B. H. (2024, October 3). *Bring your own AI: How to balance risks and innovation.* MIT Sloan Management Review. https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/bring-your-own-ai-how-to-balance-risks-and-innovation/

ONE APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE

Use Cases	Governance Approach
• Summarizing meeting notes • Rewriting internal content • Formatting reports • Drafting emails (non-client) • Creating outlines • Brainstorming ideas • Grammar/spell check • Text simplification • Generating social post drafts (internal) • Extracting non-sensitive insights from public info	**Enablement-first:** • Awareness building • Safe usage templates • Light onboarding materials
• Drafting shared documents • Creating slide content for internal review • Generating internal reports using prompts • Auto-filling internal forms • Internal decision support drafts • Summarizing group chats or transcripts • AI-supported knowledge transfer • Preliminary content for review • Synthesizing anonymized data • Task-specific workflow outputs	**Contextual Regulation:** • Conditional approvals • Functional oversight • Domain-specific disclaimers
• AI use with PII or regulated data • Generating legal, HR, or compliance content • Automated client messaging • Submitting AI-generated proposals • Uploading confidential company files • Training external tools on internal data • Creating investor-facing material • Drafting medical or scientific claims • Replicating strategic documents via AI • Bypassing internal approvals with AI automation	**Restrictive Control:** • Risk education • Strict tool boundaries • Secure alternatives

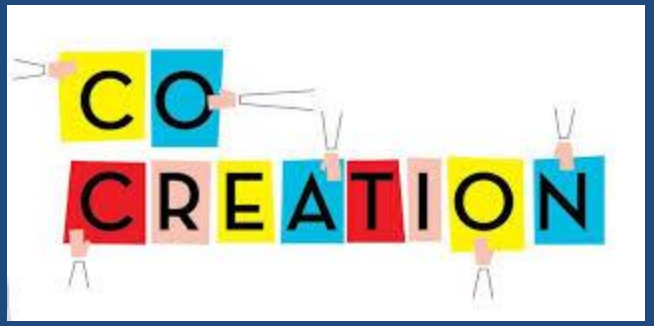
Chin, T., Li, Q., Mirone, F., & Papa, A. (2025). *Bring Your Own AI (BYOAI) in the workplace: Patterns, pitfalls, and the BYOAI-Gov™ toolkit for behavior-aware governance*.

3

CAPTURING GEN Z EXPERIMENTS

HOW TO FOSTER AND CAPTURE RESPONSIBLE EXPERIMENTATION

- ✓Hackathons
- ✓Showcases
- ✓Training Sessions



Experienced Employee + **Gen Z Employee** → MVPs

"The missing ingredient (in AI deployments) is WISDOM. Data without context is noise. The future belongs to systems that combine raw computation power with judgment, pattern recognition, and domain expertise."

Rosenthal, J., & Zuckerman, N. (2025, October 23). *AI destroys the old learning curve. The Wall Street Journal.*

Mr. Rosenthal is CEO and co-founder of ESP Logistics Technology. Mr. Zuckerman is a senior partner and managing director at the Boston Consulting Group.

Burleigh, Emma. “Silicon Valley’s Graying Workforce: Gen Z Staff Cut in Half at Tech Companies as the Average Age Goes Up by 5 Years.” *Fortune*, September 7, 2025.

Babson Buildathon!

Judging Criteria

Problem Statement & Relevance (0-20 points)

Clear articulation of the problem, relevance to the theme, and understanding of its impact.

AI-Powered Solution & Innovation (0-20 points)

Creativity, innovation, and effective use of AI technology to address the problem.

Ethical Consideration (0-20 points)

Consideration of ethical dimensions including bias, privacy, social and environmental impact.

Feasibility, Scalability, and Clear Next Steps (0-20 points)

Potential for real-world implementation, scalability, and clear path forward.

Presentation Quality (0-20 points)

Clarity, organization, and effectiveness of the presentation.

All company employees, software designers, programmers, and its 200 meteorologists, where invited to a two-day hackathon and ask to "build some weather-related working software that our customers will love." After forming teams and brainstorming they spent the next day and a half developing the idea and building out the software. On day three, the teams were given three minutes to present their concept to a panel of judges consisting of the VP of Engineering, the VP of Product, the President of the Digital Products, and an on-camera meteorologist.

4

OUTLINING LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

DESIGN FUTURE-READY CULTURES

PAY FOR TOOLS

PROMOTE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

ENCOURAGE CONTINUOUS LEARNING (GOOGLE'S 70/20/10 RULE OF THUMB)

PLATFORM	ENTERPRISE USE-CASE / KEY HIGHLIGHTS	ENTERPRISE PRICING*
ChatGPT (by OpenAI	Designed for large organizations: unlimited GPT-4 o access, admin controls, enhanced security, API credit inclusion.	Not publicly listed in full detail. Reported ~$60 per user/month minimu… ~150-user minimum
Gemini (by Google LLC	Integrated with Goog… Workspace/Cl… featur… …s).	…user/month (with 1-…commitment) for seats; up to ~$45 or ~$54/month for flexible terms.
Claude (by Anthrop	…: connect to internal …dge bases, large-context window (500k tokens), role-based access, GitHub/code integrations.	Custom pricing (“Contact sales”). Web-based hints: free + $20/month individual Pro; team tiers ~$25-30/month; enterprise requires sales engagement.
Perplexity Enterprise Pro	Research- and knowledge-worker focused: citation-enabled answers, internal data integration, team-management features.	$40 per seat/month (or $400 per seat/year) for Enterprise Pro; larger “Max” tier ~$325/seat/month (or $3,250/yr) for heavy usage.

PAY FOR TOOLS

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BUT WHICH ONES?

HARD TO KEEP UP

AI TOOLS IN 2022-23

Feature	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Bing Chat (Microsoft)	Bard (Google)
Free Access	Yes	Yes	Waitlist/Limited
Paid Tier	Yes (Plus)	No	No
Web Access	No	Yes	Limited
Mobile App	May 23	Yes (via Bing App)	No
Voice Interaction	No	No	No
Image Input	No	No	No
Image Output	No	No	No
Large Context (>100k)	No	No	No
Advanced Data Analysis	No	No	No
Coding Help	Strong	Good	Fair
Creative Writing	Strong	Good	Good

HARD TO KEEP UP

AI TOOLS IN 2023-24

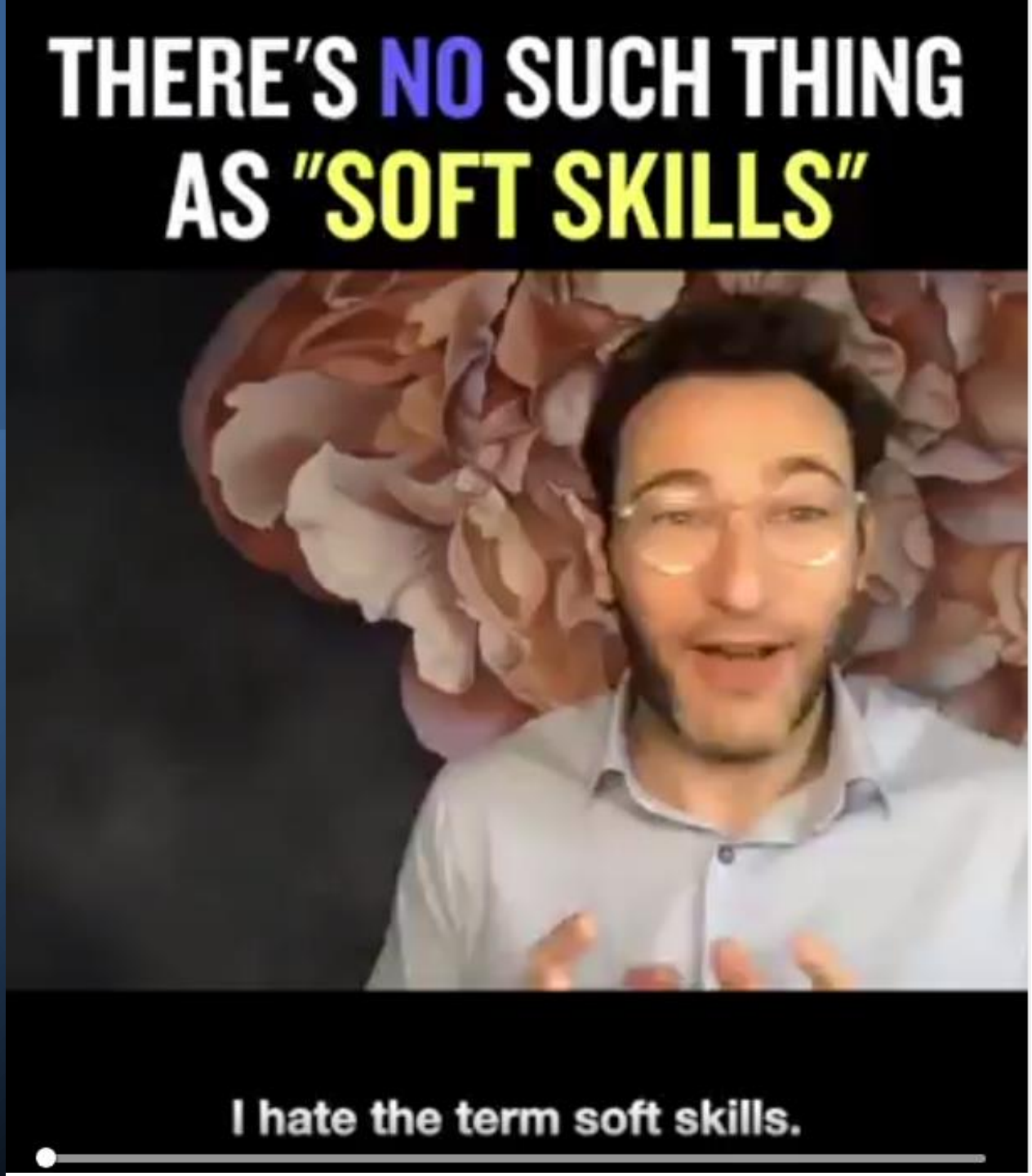
Feature	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Bing Chat (Microsoft)	Gemini (Google)
Free Access	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paid Tier	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web Access	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobile App	Yes	Yes	Yes
Voice Interaction	Yes (App)	Yes (App)	Yes (App)
Image Input	Paid	Yes (Free)	Yes (Free)
Image Output	Paid (DALL·E 3)	Yes (Free)	No
Large Context (>100k)	No	No	Paid
Advanced Data Analysis	Paid (Code Interpreter)	No	No
Coding Help	Strong	Good	Good
Creative Writing	Strong	Good	Strong

HARD TO KEEP UP

AI TOOLS IN 2024-25

Feature	ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Bing Chat (Microsoft)	Gemini (Google)
Free Access	Yes (GPT-4o)	Yes (GPT-4 Turbo)	Yes (Gemini 1.5 Pro)
Paid Tier	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web Access	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mobile App	Yes	Yes	Yes
Voice Interaction	Yes (Advanced)	Yes	Yes
Image Input	Yes	Yes	Yes
Image Output	Yes (with limits)	Yes	Yes
Large Context (>100k)	Paid	Paid	Yes (Free)
Advanced Data Analysis	Yes (Free)	Paid (M365)	Limited (In Gemini Adv)
Coding Help	Strong	Strong	Strong
Creative Writing	Strong	Good	Strong

PROMOTE PSYCHOLOICAL SAFETY



HUMAN NOT SOFT SKILLS

- Human skills include **patience, empathy, listening, handling difficult conversation, and carrying out effective confrontations.**
- Leaders with human skills make better leaders
- Leaders have to practice these skills.

ENCOURAGE EXPERIMENTATION

FUND EXPERIMENTATION

https://www.wcvb.com/article/babson-college-integrates-ai-studies/65995717

"With AI, knowledge can materialize instantly. Innovation and disruption will arrive in shock waves, not cycles. The challenge will be not building the tools but surviving the pace of their consequences. Leader who adapt to this new world will shape the future of commerce. Those who don't will be replaced."

Rosenthal, J., & Zuckerman, N. (2025, October 23). *AI destroys the old learning curve. The Wall Street Journal*.

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THANK YOU!

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